



From Last Place to First

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, August 16, 2010

As most of you are most likely aware from the front page article in the San Jose Mercury News on August 12, The San Jose Municipal Rose Garden was selected as America's Best Rose Garden. What an incredible achievement! Congratulations and thanks to all involved including the paid park maintenance city staff and the non paid volunteers.

The rebirth of the Rose Garden could not have been done by only park maintenance staff or only by volunteers. It is the combination of both that allows for this fantastic achievement. And the leadership of Beverly Rose Hopper and Terry Reilly.

Just over three years ago, I walked through the Rose Garden park with numerous concerned neighbors and saw the decline and devastation. I knew then that our City did not have the resources to pay for staff to care for the park, nor would a band-aid approach allow the park to reach its potential. I also knew the City was behind the times with it's volunteer policy. Instead, I proposed a pilot for outsourcing park maintenance. That caused the unions to assemble and defend the status quo.

Bringing up the topic of outsourcing allowed for the larger message to get out that this park and other parks need attention, especially with our structural budget deficit. Although outsourcing park maintenance, even as a pilot, was not approved in May 2007, I did push for and was successful in having council support amending the City's volunteer policy in October 2007.

I remember asking several times then-Vice Mayor Dave Cortese to accept my friendly amendments to allow more flexibility in the volunteer policy, including a stipulation that corporations be allowed to have their employees donate time at San Jose parks on their community service days. This change allowed 250 Google employees and 150 Recology employees to volunteer in the Rose Garden this summer, for example.

The Municipal Rose Garden is a city landmark and now a national one. Volunteers include residents of San Jose and people from all of over the county. The volunteers are doers and not talkers, as they enjoy giving back to the larger community. I think they serve as an example of the JFK quote (with a twist): "Ask not what your city government can do for you, but what you can do for the community you call home."

Municipal governments will continue to shrink as revenues will be constrained as pension costs rise. Therefore—now more than ever—residents could provide small increments of their time improving their local park, trail, traffic medians etc... Waiting on government will be taking longer than ever before.

However, residents may ask a fair question as to why cities do not do more to provide services at a lower cost. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported recently, San Jose will be saving approximately \$4 million a year by outsourcing janitorial. The \$4 million in savings was substantial enough to garner national attention and is the trend nationally.

I am very proud to live in a city where doers start with a dead vine and do not give up. As a result of the conviction from the Rose Garden volunteers, the City of San Jose Rose Garden is Number One!

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